



BEST FOR EASTERN TRADITION

GUNTU, JAPAN

Inspired by the idea of a small floating hotel, Guntû (pronounced 'gan-su' and named after a small local blue crab) is a modern take on a *ryokan* by Tokyo architect Yasushi Horibe. Sliding paper screens, wooden baths, kimono-style dressing gowns and fantastic sushi make this perhaps Japan's most interesting boat. There's nothing else even remotely like it. Small but immaculately laid out, it has 19 cabins and was commissioned by a shipbuilding company in Hiroshima Prefecture to mark its centenary. The one-to-three-night journey begins in Onomichi (an hour's drive from Hiroshima, which is an 80-minute plane hop from Tokyo or an easy add-on to a bullet-train tour) and ktktk cruises at a leisurely 10 knots an hour across the waters of the Seto Inland Sea, which is speckled with 3,000 or so small islands. Life on board is haiku-inspiredly peaceful; the experience is both serene and quintessentially Japanese.

Beneath a simple Noah's Ark-style gabled roof, the interiors are a showcase of contemporary design, using 11 different woods and a layout modelled on traditional homes, plus a healthy serving of *omotenashi* (that untranslatable word synonymous with the warmest welcome). There's the minimal ribbon staircase in the white lobby; *onsen*-style baths infused with fresh lemons; a small spa; discreet staff dressed in contemporary neutrals; and an authentic sweets ceremony performed in the *tatami*-mat bar. Attention to detail in the wooden cabins is also flawless – from the tin tea caddies by Kyoto's Kaikado to the wabi-sabi teacups by artist Taro Tabuchi. Not to forget the food: local fishermen arrive daily at the boat's jetty with fresh catch, which later reappears at the excellent six-seat sushi counter. Very special. DANIELLE DEMETRIOU
BOOK IT Berths from around £1,350 per night (based on two sharing), including meals and activities. +3 6823 6055; guntu.jp

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